

**- Groundbreaking Law Overhauls VA's Disability Claims System -** *Washington, DC* – U.S. Rep. John Hall (D-NY19) and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) today announced that the President has signed into law a comprehensive veterans benefit bill which included their legislation to overhaul the VA's disability claims bureaucracy. Congressman Hall crafted the Disability Claims Modernization Act (H.R. 5892) and pushed it through the House. U.S. Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) introduced companion legislation in the Senate and helped secure its Senate passage.

"This law will comprehensively modernize the Veterans Benefits Administration and make it more accountable," said Hall, Chairman of the House Veterans Subcommittee on Disability Assistance. "It will help the VA become a 21st century, world-class entity that fulfills its purpose of serving our veterans, their families, and survivors."

"This is a victory for all of the brave men and women who have put their lives on the line to defend the freedoms we hold dear," said Senator Clinton. "I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Congressman Hall to help pass this legislation that will streamline the VA disability benefits system so that it works for our veterans and not against them. Ensuring that a system is in place that cuts through the red tape to deliver the benefits that our veterans have earned is essential to keeping our promise as a nation to honor their service."

"With the passage and enactment of this historic piece of legislation, veterans caught in the disability claims nightmare will begin to see common sense solutions applied to this decade's old dilemma," stated Michael Tokarz, National Legislative Council for the American Legion. "The American Legion is impressed with the performance of Congressman Hall in his ability to craft and move this Act through Congress in a bipartisan manner in a highly volatile election year."

The Disability Claims Modernization Act makes several sweeping changes to the way the VA processes disability claims so that injured veterans can get the benefits they are owed easier. A veteran's disability claim first has to be approved before a veteran may receive a monthly pension and expanded access to VA health care. For too long, disabled veterans suffering from combat wounds have faced an adversarial claims processing system as well as an average six-month wait before receiving assistance. Many veterans or their surviving spouses or families have been forced to wait for years, and in some cases decades, for the VA to accept their disability claims.

Clinton and Hall's legislation passed as part of a comprehensive Senate veterans' omnibus bill. Because the Senate more commonly uses the vehicle of larger, omnibus bills to pass legislation through its chamber, all of the provisions of Congressman Hall's Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act of 2008 (HR 5892) were rolled into S. 3023, the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act.

"This legislation being signed into law truly came as the result of the tireless work of veterans and their families to finally receive the treatment and benefits they deserve," said Hall. "Over the past two years, hundreds of veterans have contacted my office seeking help with their long-overdue claims. They told stories of waiting months and years to receive the benefits they earned by their selfless sacrifice. Instead of promptly being granted what they were owed, they

were given the run around by a Veterans Administration plagued by archaic processing systems and a lack of accountability."

Hall has led the fight in Congress against the VA claims backlog by holding a series of hearings in his subcommittee in Washington, DC and a field hearing last October in New Windsor about the claims backlog. With the information obtained during these hearings and from meetings with countless veterans, Hall wrote the Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act. The House originally passed Hall's bill unanimously by a vote of 429-0 on July 30.

"Good intentions and words of support for veterans are numerous in Washington," said Tokarz of the American Legion. "True results that will make a real difference in people's lives stand out. With two consecutive years of budgets that exceeded expectations and now the passage of the Disability Claims Modernization Act of 2008, Congressman Hall's solid results for the veterans of this country are undisputed."

"Our veterans have sacrificed in defense of our nation, and should not have to wait months or even years to receive their benefits. By signing this important legislation into law we are ensuring that the VA Disability Benefits system delivers the resources and services that our combat wounded heroes and their families need to continue to recover from their injuries and carry on with their lives," said Senator Clinton.

The White House Domestic Policy Office described the bill as "good government." Additionally, all the major national veterans' organizations supported the legislation, including the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), The American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), AMVETS, National Veterans Legal Service Program (NVLSP), National Organization of Veterans Advocates, Vietnam Veterans of America, Military Officers' Association of America (MOAA), the National Association for Uniformed Services, and The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA), among others.

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